AMERICAN AND CROOKED RIVER PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

NEZ PERCE NATIONAL FOREST

MARCH 2005

ORGANIZATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

THIS DOCUMENT IS ORGANIZED INTO FOUR CHAPTERS AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION AS FOLLOWS:

CHAPTER 1 – DESCRIBES THE PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION, THE PROPOSED ACTION, AND THE SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS.

CHAPTER 2 – DESCRIBES THE ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROPOSED ACTIONS AND PRESENTS AND COMPARES ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION.

CHAPTER 3 – DESCRIBES THE PHYSICAL, BIOLOGICAL, AND SOCIAL SETTING OF THE ANALYSIS AREA AS THEY EXIST TODAY AND ARE TRENDING TOWARDS INTO THE FUTURE BASED ON IMPLEMENTATION OF ANY OF THE ALTERNATIVES DESCRIBED IN CHAPTER 2, INCLUDING THE NO ACTION.

CHAPTER 4 - LISTS THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT.

APPENDICES – PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR THE READER AND INCLUDES A MAP LIST, GLOSSARY, REFERENCES, AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING INFORMATION.

AMERICAN AND CROOKED RIVER PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

MARCH 2005

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SUMMARY

The Forest Service has prepared this draft environmental impact statement to disclose potential effects of the proposed action and the alternatives to the proposed action within and surrounding the American and Crooked River project area in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. The project area is located within the Red River Ranger District on the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho. This Final Environmental Impact statement discloses direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts and irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources that would result from implementation of the proposed action and alternatives.

The project area is located in two separate areas within the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho County. Portions of the American and Crooked River watersheds are contained in the project area boundary and are located in the Clearwater Mountains of the Rocky Mountain physiographic province. The American River watershed is located north and northeast of Elk City, while the Crooked River watershed is located west and southwest of Elk City. The project area, which encompasses approximately 39,000 acres, lies north and east of the town of Orogrande and includes National Forest System lands around the Elk City Township.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the project is to reduce existing and potential forest fuels, create conditions that will contribute to sustaining long-lived fire tolerant tree species (ponderosa pine, western larch) and contribute to the economic and social well-being of people who use and reside within the surrounding area.

The Forest Plan provides direction for the management of the American and Crooked River project area and the desired future condition. The purpose and need for this project was determined after comparing the desired future condition and the existing condition of the American and Crooked River project area. The area's existing condition was determined using field data and the findings and recommendations from the South Fork Clearwater River Landscape Assessment (SFLA). It is important to note that the South Fork Clearwater River Landscape Assessment is not a decision document and the recommendations contained within the SFLA were considered as recommendations and not direction. This analysis addresses only a few of the overall package of actions that were recommended in these documents.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS PROJECT ARE TO:

Promote the health and vigor of timber stands and improve the environment for long-lived, fire resistant species by reducing densities of lodgepole pine or other small diameter trees that provide fuel ladders for development of crown fires,

Increase relative proportions of long-lived, fire resistant tree species by restoring or regenerating to western larch, ponderosa pine, and by protecting large diameter ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and western larch,

Reduce the risk of large-scale crown fire spread by creating vegetative patterns, including fuel breaks and safety areas, through harvest or silvicultural treatments, that would increase fire suppression and management effectiveness, and

Reduce the likelihood of severe local fire effects by removing dead, dying, and downed trees that would otherwise result in high fuel loading.

THE PROPOSED ACTION

The American-Crooked River Project proposes to treat up to 3,452 acres with 1,170 acres in the American River Watershed and 1,816 acres in the Crooked River watershed. The watershed restoration associated with this project would includes various types of restoration, such as up to 24.6 miles of road improvement for watershed improvement of which 16.6 miles is required with 8 miles approved as funding allows. Soil restoration on up to 58 acres is proposed with 32 acres of soil restoration required. The following table is a summary of proposed activities associated with this project. Two numbers in the column divided by a slash indicate the amount of required first and additional projects (dependent on available funding) second.

THE ISSUES

The Forest Service worked closely with the public to identify issues and concerns. A comment period last fall produced 20 letters from the public, and state and federal agencies. These responses were condensed into two substantive issue areas. These are effects to water quality and fish habitat and the fuel reduction effectiveness. There are no impacts to terrestrial threatened and endangered species, and heritage resources, but a summary of impacts are listed below in the general projects impacts of interest, because some commenters had an interest in these areas.

THE ALTERNATIVES

The alternatives in this document were analyzed by their effect to the substantive issue areas. Indicators were developed to compare the effects. A summary of the effects can be found in the following section. The summary table below describes the treatments. It shows the total acres to be treated by alternative. Alternative D, (the preferred alternative) includes both required watershed restoration actions, and additional watershed restorations actions that have been analyzed and may be implemented if funding is available. The minimum watershed restoration that will be completed as part of this alternative is what is displayed as required. If funding is available, the watershed restoration could be up to the amount in Alternative E, and is displayed as additional.

TABLE 0.1: – COMBINED ALTERNATIVE OVERVIEW FOR AMERICAN/CROOKED RIVER WATERSHEDS

Proposed Activity – Total Project		Alt B	Alt C	Alt D[1]	Alt E
Acres of Treatment	Tractor Yard/Machine Pile	1,138	1,172	1,813	901
	Cable Yard/Broadcast Burn	945	1,095	1,173	780
	Roadside Salvage	467	477	466	475
	Total Acres Treated	**2,550**	**2,744**	**3,452**	**2,156**
	Percent Clearcut	42%	42%	34%	28%
	Percent Partial Cut/Thin	58%	58%	66%	72%
	Wildland Urban Interface	559	731	1113	290
Miles of Temporary Road Construction[2]		8.0	14.3	14.3	5.4
Miles of Road Reconditioning[3]		79.4	80.3	90.5	74.3
Watershed Restoration Package Improvements					
Miles (acres) of Decommissioned Roads[4]		13.9 (56)	17.3 (69)	18.9/18.1 (73/74)	37 (147)
Miles of Watershed Road Improvement[5]		16.0	16.6	16.6/8	24.6
Number of Sites of Watershed Road Improvement		1	3	3	3
Stream Crossing Improvements[6]		10	10	13/21	34
Miles of Instream Improvements		10.3	11.1	11.1/3.5	14.6
Miles of Recreation and Trail Improvements		2.3	2.3	2.3/2.3	4.6
Acres of Recreation and Trail Improvements		0.1	8.1	8.1	8.1
Acres of Mine Site Reclamation		7	7	7/2	9
Acres of Soil Restoration in addition to road decommissioning		18	26	32/26	58
Access change for vehicle use - motorized trail use (ATV) to restricted use (miles)[7]		2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6
Miles of Access change for vehicle use[8]		1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6
Employment Opportunities					
Job Years[9]		163	188	250	152

[1] Alternative D has additional restoration that could be implemented if funding were available. First figure is required watershed improvement projects only; second figure is additional watershed improvement projects.[1] This is an access change, which restricts use to two wheeled vehicles or snowmobiles over snow, from previous all terrain vehicle use (ATV).

[2] Temporary roads would be decommissioned within one to three years of construction.

[3] This category includes a range of activities, such as surface blading, drainage repair, and roadway brushing with occasional culvert installations, slump repairs, and stabilization work. The roadwork in this category is primarily for the purpose of timber removal.

[4] Road decommissioning for this project covers a range of activities, from recontouring to abandonment due to grown in conditions. See Appendix D

[5] Some of the roadwork in this category is also included in the Miles of Road Reconditioning category in this table. Although this roadwork is primarily for the purpose of timber removal, it will also result in an improvement in watershed health.

[6] Stream crossing improvements include upgrading or improving culverts and bridges to improve fish passage and peak water flows and are listed as the number of sites.

[7] This is an access change, which restricts use to two wheeled vehicles or snowmobiles over snow, from previous all terrain vehicle use (ATV).

[8] This category includes 1.5 miles of road-to-trail conversion.

[9] Direct Employment Opportunities, year-long.

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